



EA by the slice

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Census makes its enterprise architecture easy to access

Census' Jack Leidich says a visualization tool lets bureau staff tinker with just the slice of the enterprise architecture they need.



To the Census Bureau's Jack Leidich, enterprise architecture is like a pizza from which users can take slices with the toppings of their choice.

The bureau has implemented an online visual modeling environment to make enterprise architecture plans more accessible to managers at all levels.

"It's a process, not a document," said Leidich, chief of the bureau's Enterprise Architecture Office. "That's why we are really promoting the electronic nature of the tool."

Census has been working on its architecture for a couple of years, said Richard W. Swartz, the associate director for IT. Since the fall, the bureau has used Metis 3.2 software from Computas Inc. of Sammamish, Wash., for project planning and capital asset management.

"Everybody understands conceptually the value of enterprise architecture," Swartz said. Indeed, the bureau published its first framework on paper in the late 1990s. But the online environment gives branch chiefs and project leaders a wide-angle view of the IT environment plus a chance to zoom in on the details.

Metis is a general tool for model development, said Bill Wright, president and chief

executive officer of Computas. Its usefulness in enterprise architecture development comes from ease of reconfiguration for different projects, he said.

Areas within Census that are benefiting from the framework tool include capital planning and investment control, strategic planning, and security, Leidich said. About 50 Metis users work in a variety of Census jobs and management levels.

Think higher

“I’m trying to get the lower levels to think higher,” Leidich said.

For low-level processes, the bureau formerly used visual modeling tools from Rational Software Corp. of Cupertino, Calif., and Popkin Software Inc. of New York.

To view the enterprise architecture with Metis, end users need the Metis Model Browser client, which allows zooming, panning, drilling down and navigating in read-only mode. Another Metis client application called Annotator lets the users apply virtual “sticky notes” to diagrams, Leidich said. The Metis Model Editor, Model Designer and Developer clients have progressively more features for building and editing visual models. A typical Metis model has tens of thousands of graphical elements, Wright said. The software’s native Extensible Markup Language environment supports other Web services standards including Simple Object Access Protocol, or SOAP, and Web Distributed Authoring and Versioning, or WebDAV, an open specification for collaborative authoring.

Dynamic queries on the fly let staff members look for outlying investments, Leidich said.

“I’ve turned into a big-picture person through this process,” Leidich said, through seeing the whole bureau architecture on his screen and zooming in on specific areas.

Exhibit 300

Metis also helps Census managers complete the Exhibit 300 documents that must accompany requests to the Office of Management and Budget for new IT funding, Swartz said. The Exhibit 300 process requires budget proposals to fit in with performance measures and the agency enterprise architecture.

Preparing the Exhibit 300 business cases has become a massive undertaking, Swartz said. Census uses its Exhibit 300s and business-planning process to make sure hardware and software will be a good fit.

The Exhibit 300 process is designed to enforce an overall architecture, so that in the future there will be fewer stovepipe and dissimilar systems to support, Swartz said.

Many of Census’ projects take advantage of its global site licenses for software from Oracle Corp. and SAS Institute Inc. of Cary, N.C., Swartz said. Projects that need high-

end applications from other vendors must provide justification.

Swartz also wants a more homogeneous hardware architecture for about 900 servers and 900T of storage, and he said he hopes Metis will assist in patch management and change control.

“If you let little islands pop up, the long-term support costs are just unbelievable,” Swartz said.

Census also has used the tool to map its projects to the Office of Management and Budget Business Reference Model framework, which will create opportunities to share, reuse and collaborate, Leidich said.

The only weakness he has found in Metis comes in printing and reporting. It does a “fantastic job of visualization,” he said, but when someone needs hard copy, the printout looks like a spreadsheet. Census would like more flexibility and options for customization.

But in the end, “an enterprise architecture is not about the tool, it’s about the process, the benefit, the governance,” Leidich said.